



Identifying Essential Job Functions



Washington State
Department of Personnel
Personnel Services Division



Essential Functions Guidelines

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Introduction

Essential Functions are by definition those fundamental job duties and responsibilities an incumbent who holds the job would have to perform in order to be considered qualified for the position. Essential Functions tend to be primary, crucial, necessary, integral, imperative, and/or indispensable.

Identifying Essential Functions is critical to:

- ⇒ Establishing appropriate standards
- ⇒ Development of an accurate and objective job description
- ⇒ Strategic advertising and recruitment
- ⇒ Developing appropriate interview questions
- ⇒ Determining whether a candidate or employee can perform each function and with what degree of competence
- ⇒ Determining whether or not, and to what extent, specific job accommodations can be made for a particular individual
- ⇒ Evidence to base employment decisions

It is important that Essential Functions are specifically identified and written into job descriptions, including Washington Management Service (WMS), Exempt and Classified positions. They should be reviewed and updated regularly. Employees should clearly understand what the Essential Functions of their respective positions entail.

When to Identify Essential Functions

I. Essential Functions Shall Be Identified & Clearly Noted:

- A. When a position is established
- B. While the position is vacant
- C. Prior to interviewing
- D. Prior to employee medical examinations

II. Essential Functions May Be Identified & Clearly Noted:

- A. Upon request from an employee or employee representative
- B. During a reallocation process
- C. When reasonable accommodation is being considered
- D. During an employee's annual evaluation
- E. Periodically by updating employee's job description

Conducting a Position Analysis

The term “position analysis” is used in this document to describe an informal process by which information about a specific job or position is collected and analyzed. The information provided by a position analysis may or may not be helpful in properly identifying essential job functions, depending on how it is conducted.

To identify essential job functions, a position analysis should focus on the purpose of the job and the importance of actual job functions in achieving this purpose.

Evaluating “importance” may include consideration of the frequency with which a function is performed, the amount of time spent on the function, and the consequences if the function is not performed.

The position analysis may contain information on the manner in which a job currently is performed, but should not conclude that ability to perform the job in that manner is an essential function unless there is no other way to perform the function without causing Undue Hardship. A position analysis will be most helpful if it focuses on the results or outcome of the function, not solely on the way it customarily is performed. Concentrate on only those qualification standards that will carry out key tasks and responsibilities and without which the key tasks and responsibilities cannot be carried out.

To be most effective, a position analysis should focus on linking the required job functions to performance of the position’s assigned tasks and responsibilities.

Qualification Standards

Qualification standards must be job related and consistent with business necessity. A qualification standard may include information about the employment site, work environment, administrative demands, equipment or tools used, physical/mental/cognitive factors, productivity standards, health and safety issues or work place conduct requirements.

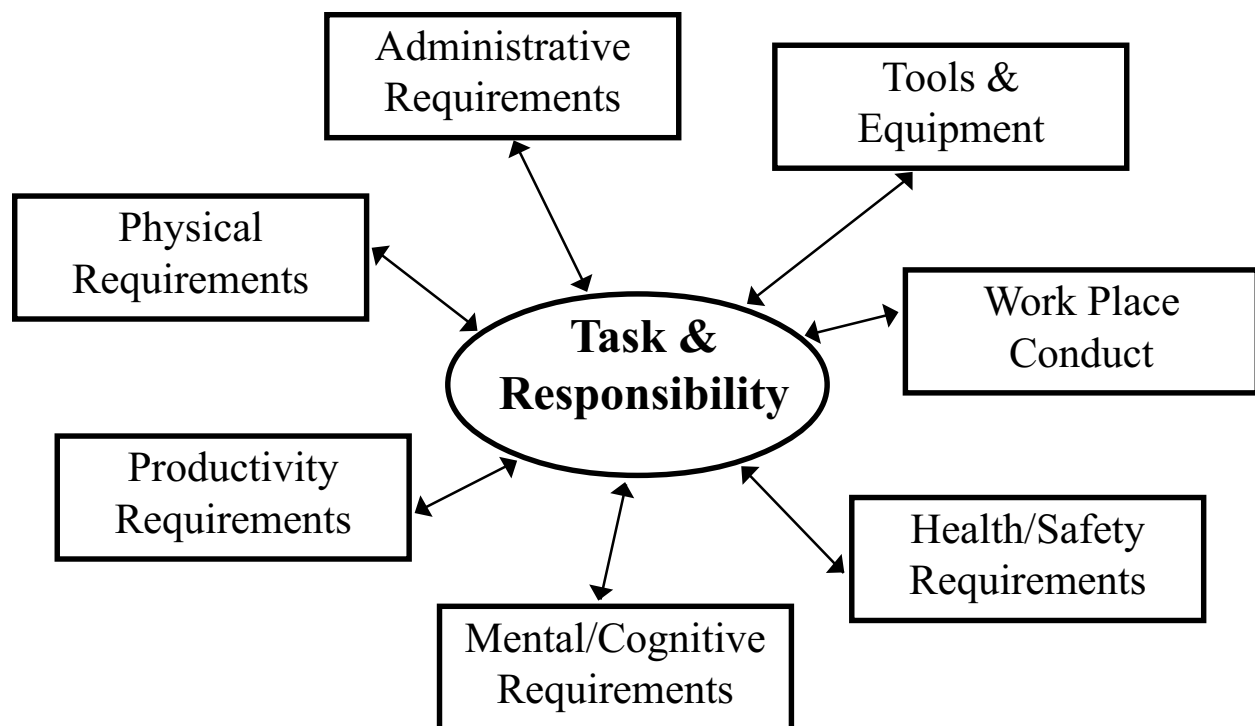
Qualification standards must be a legitimate measure or requirement for the specific job (e.g. job-related) in question, not a general class of jobs. Moreover, to be consistent with business necessity, a qualification standard must be directly related to performance of one or more task or responsibilities assigned to the position.

For example, if the position exists for an incumbent to transport and deliver mail, when hiring or retaining an employee in the position, an employer would not be expected to select an individual who could not see. The ability to see, in this example, would be directly connected to the ability to perform the task or responsibility of transporting and delivering mail.

Comprehensive Position Analysis

A comprehensive position analysis may identify job-related demands in the following areas:

- ⇒ Tasks & Responsibilities
- ⇒ Administrative Requirements
- ⇒ Tools & Equipment Used
- ⇒ Physical Factors
- ⇒ Mental/Cognitive Factors
- ⇒ Productivity Standards
- ⇒ Health & Safety Requirements
- ⇒ Work Place Conduct Requirements



Tasks & Responsibilities

- **What is the individual paid to accomplish?**
 - ✓ Inspect asphalt plant operations
 - ✓ Provide supervision to 15 employees
- **What are the tasks the employee will be held responsible for?**
 - ✓ Filing
 - ✓ Correspondence
 - ✓ Responding to telephone inquiries
 - ✓ Conduct annual evaluations
- **What does the employee actually do to carry out tasks?**
 - ✓ Use the computer
 - ✓ Answer telephone
 - ✓ Look up information in databases/files
 - ✓ Meet individually with each employee
- **Describe the material to be read:**
 - ✓ Technical reports and manuals
 - ✓ Names/mailling addresses
 - ✓ Written directions
- **Describe mathematical functions to be performed:**
 - ✓ Counting items
 - ✓ Statistical operations
 - ✓ Measuring items
- **Describe the writing assignments to be performed:**
 - ✓ Grant proposals
 - ✓ Technical reports and articles
 - ✓ Program brochures

Administrative Requirements

These demands document the administrative requirements of a specific job and may include information on:

- Description date
- Nature and scope
- Department/division/unit
- Position title & classification code
- Grade/level of authority

- Shift (day, night, swing, weekends)
- Hours/breaks
- Building location/floor
- Certifications/degrees/licenses
- Previous work experience
- Specialized knowledge, skills or abilities
- Application/testing/interview(s)
- Pre-offer examinations (drugs/alcohol)
- Post-offer medical examinations
- Post-offer probationary requirements

Tools & Equipment

These demands document the types of tools and equipment an employee will be expected to use in a specific job, for example:

- Dump truck
- Computer
- Copier
- Material grading sieves
- Power tools (chain saw, auger)
- Pick & shovel
- Front-end loader
- Power generation equipment
- Flagger paddle
- Ear plugs & safety glasses
- Firearm & bullet proof vest

Physical Requirements

These demands document the physical requirements of a specific job. Criteria may include:

- Lifting
- Carrying
- Push/pull
- Sitting
- Standing (in place)
- On feet
- Walking
- Bending
- Turn/twist
- Kneeling

- Squatting
- Crawling
- Climbing
- Reaching (out)
- Reaching (up)
- Grasping
- Wrist turning
- Pinching
- Finger manipulation

Mental/Cognitive Factors

These demands document the mental or cognitive characteristics of a specific job. Criteria may include:

- Problem solving skills
- Memory
- Reading comprehension
- Editing
- Expressive communication skills
- Understand/recall verbal instructions
- Understand/recall written instructions
- Safety awareness
- Measurement skills
- Function independently
- Interact with public or coworkers in person
- Follow instructions
- Interact effectively in group situations
- Accept supervisory authority
- Cope with potentially stressful situations
- Maintain professional work place conduct

Productivity Requirements

These demands document the expected performance outcomes. Consider the following:

- An employer may establish production standards if these standards uniformly apply to all applicants and employees in that job.
- A “job-related” standard or selection criterion may evaluate or measure all functions of a job and employers may continue to select, hire and retain people who can perform all these functions.

- An employer may not intentionally select a particular level of production for the purpose of excluding an employee.
- What is the employee expected to accomplish?
- What is an acceptable error rate?
- Consider standards that include:
 - ✓ Process
 - ✓ Time
 - ✓ Quality
 - ✓ Quantity

Health & Safety Requirements

These demands document the environment of the specific job site and may include criteria on:

- Inside/outside
- Cold/heat
- Wet/dry
- Noise/vibrations
- Hazards
- Fumes/dust/odors
- Confined spaces
- High elevations
- Ionizing radiation
- Safety equipment
- Slippery surfaces
- Special clothing
- Wetness
- Near/far vision
- Color discrimination
- Depth perception
- Hearing sensitivity

Work Place Conduct Requirements

These demands document the employer's conduct rules and may specify behavior or conduct that is prohibited in the work place:

- Age discrimination
- Disability discrimination
- Illegal abuse of drugs & alcohol
- Personal threats and violence
- Race discrimination
- Sex discrimination
- Unauthorized weapons
- Unprofessional behavior
- Illegal use of State property

Work place conduct requirements shall be equally applied to all employees within the same job category.

Conducting an Informal Position Analysis

Conducting an informal position analysis may be necessary to identify and link key job functions to performance of an assigned task or responsibility. The Position Analysis Matrix may be a helpful tool in this process. Copy and enlarge the blank matrix on page 10 and complete the following 9 step process (see matrix example on page 11):

1. Obtain the position's most recent Classification Questionnaire (CQ) and identify one primary task or responsibility the position exists to perform, or for which the incumbent is held accountable.
2. Identify the Administrative Requirements associated with the specific task or responsibility.
3. Identify the Tools & Equipment associated with the specific task or responsibility.
4. Identify the Physical, Mental or Cognitive Factors associated with the specific task or responsibility.
5. Identify the Productivity Requirements associated with the specific task or responsibility.
6. Identify the Health & Safety Requirements associated with the specific task or responsibility.
7. Summarize your findings in a descriptive format.
8. Conduct an Essential Function Analysis (see pages 12-14). Enter summary onto CQ (see page 15).
9. Repeat steps 1–8 until all tasks and responsibilities the incumbent is held accountable for have been identified.

Position Analysis Matrix

Task or Responsibility	Administrative Demands	Tools & Equipment	Mental/Physical Factors	Productivity Requirements	Health & Safety Requirements	Work Place Conduct

Position Analysis Matrix (example)

LPN Outreach Nurse

Task or Responsibility	Administrative Demands	Tools & Equipment	Mental/Physical Factors	Productivity Requirements	Health & Safety Requirements	Work Place Conduct
Incumbent provides Bilingual health care information and referral services to the migrant workers population.	<p>Scope of responsibility includes all of Eastern Washington.</p> <p>Position is located in Yakima, WA.</p> <p>Mon. - Fri.</p> <p>8 a.m. - 5 p.m.</p> <p>Requires Bilingual proficiency in English and Spanish</p> <p>3 Yrs. LPN exp.</p> <p>Nurse License Certif. Level II</p>	<p>Computer</p> <p>Typewriters</p> <p>Copier</p> <p>FAX</p> <p>Printer</p> <p>Telephone</p> <p>Personal Vehicle</p>	<p>Sedentary in nature.</p> <p>Requires ability to work in a private and confidential setting.</p> <p>Must have clear and expressive communication skills.</p> <p>Ability to understand and recall written or verbal communications correctly.</p> <p>Interact effectively with public and co-workers in person.</p> <p>Independent decision making.</p>	<p>Must maintain expert level understanding of diverse cultures or populations.</p> <p>Must be able to communicate health information effectively in Spanish and English.</p> <p>Must maintain proper professional credentials identified by the national Center for Disease Control (CDC).</p>	<p>Position requires incumbent to travel frequently and in moderately inclement weather conditions.</p> <p>Incumbent works in environments with a broad range of health and safety issues related to all types of disease medications and prevention.</p>	<p>Must comply with internal policies and procedures governing conduct.</p>

Administrative Requirements for an LPN Outreach Nurse (example)

- 3 years LPN nursing experience
- Nursing License Certification Level II
- Valid WSDL
- Auto insurance coverage
- Located in Yakima, Washington
- Working hours: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- Monday - Friday

Fundamental Job Duty for an LPN Outreach Nurse (example)

The bilingual incumbent provides health care information and referral services to migrant populations in Eastern Washington. Typical tools used include computer, typewriter, copier, FAX, printer, telephone and personal vehicle. Position is sedentary in nature, requiring the incumbent to work in private and confidential settings, have clear and expressive communication skills, and ability to understand and recall written or verbal communications in English and

Spanish. Incumbent must be able to interact effectively with the public and coworkers in person. Position requires independent decision-making. Productivity requirements include maintaining expert level understanding of diverse cultures/populations, ability to communicate health information effectively in Spanish and English, and maintain proper professional credentials as set forth by the national Center for Disease Control (CDC). Position requires incumbent to travel frequently throughout the year, including inclement weather conditions. Incumbent must be willing to work in environments with a broad range of health and safety issues. Must comply with internal policies and procedures governing work place conduct.

Essential Function Analysis

An Essential Function Analysis focuses on identifying the fundamental job duties and responsibilities that are essential for successful job performance.

Essential Functions tend to be:

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
| ✓ Critical | ✓ Necessary | ✓ Fundamental |
| ✓ Integral | ✓ Crucial | ✓ Imperative |
| ✓ Indispensable | ✓ Primary | |

Marginal Functions tend to be:

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|
| ✓ Non-Essential | ✓ Minimal | ✓ Borderline |
| ✓ Passable | ✓ Extra | ✓ Incidental |
| ✓ Peripheral | ✓ Accessory | |

- Determine if an employee in the position is actually required to perform the function consistently.
- If an individual who holds the position is actually required to perform a function the employer asserts is an essential function, the inquiry will then center around whether removing the function would fundamentally alter that position.
- Reasons why removing a function could fundamentally alter the position:
 - ✓ The position exists to actually perform the function.
 - ✓ There is a limited number of other employees available to perform the function, or among whom the function can be distributed.
 - ✓ A function is highly specialized, and the person in the position is hired for special expertise or ability to perform the function.

- An Essential Function Analysis may contain information on the manner in which a job currently is performed, but should not conclude that ability to perform the job in that manner is an essential function, unless there is no other way to perform the function without causing Undue Hardship.

Examples of Essential Functions that Are Only Conducted a Small Percentage of Time

- **Airline Pilot:** 25 percent of time requires take offs and landings. These are essential to the job.
- **Fire Fighter:** For the sake of argument, let's say only 5 percent of time is spent actually fighting a fire, yet no one would disagree that the tasks of fighting a fire are essential functions of the job.
- **Police Officer:** Only 5 percent of time may be spent using a gun, but use of a gun is an essential function.
- **Teacher:** Only 10 percent of time may involve talking to parents of students, but communication with parents is an essential function of the job.
- **Cashier:** An essential function may be processing customer's coupons, even though this may only occur 10 percent of the time.
- **Lifeguard:** An essential function is conducting CPR, even though the need to perform this procedure may rarely occur.

Describing Essential Functions

- Use results-oriented language as much as possible (as opposed to describing the method used to obtain the results). *For example, an essential function may be for an employee to relocate (as opposed to lift) 50 lb. archive boxes from storage areas to work stations.*
- Concentrate on only those tasks that will carry out key responsibilities and without which the key responsibilities cannot be carried out. *For example, an essential function may be for a supervisor to complete annual employee performance evaluations, through means of an individualized assessment and interactive process.*
- Do not include those tasks that would be helpful, but not essential, if the incumbent could carry out. *You may though identify these types of tasks as "marginal functions".*

- Do not include any tasks the incumbent has done once and will never do again.
- Do not include those tasks for which you normally train on the job. *The employer may, as a condition of employment, make it an essential function for an employee to successfully learn and implement a new task within a given time frame.*
- Do not include a “wish list” of future tasks.
- Describe the job “as is”, not how it “might be”.
- Use clear, concise language.
- Keep the content job-related and consistent with business necessity.

Conducting an Essential Function Analysis

To help you determine whether a given demand is an essential function, ask the following questions:

- Does the position exist to perform this job function?
- What is the employer’s judgment regarding which functions or job requirements are essential?
- Would the position be fundamentally different if this function or job requirement was altered?
- Is the number of employees to whom this function or job requirement could be given limited?
- Is this a highly specialized function or job requirement?
- What percentage of time is spent performing this function or actually applying the job requirement?
- What would be the consequences if this function or job requirement was not included?
- Is there a current incumbent in this position who performs this function or meets the job requirement?
- Did the past incumbent of this position perform this function or meet the job requirement?